

DoD Revamping, Simplifying PCS Move Process

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WASHINGTON, April 24, 2000 -- DoD is revamping and simplifying its permanent-change-of-station process to make it easier, faster, less expensive and less stressful for more than 700,000 service members and their family members who move around the world each year.

The initiative is targeted at scrapping mountains of paperwork, eliminating out-of-pocket expenses and creating a user-friendly, Internet-based, personalized, state-of-the-art relocation system.

When the new system is implemented, service members will, among other benefits, save hundreds of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses, spend less time filling out paperwork and visit fewer offices to in- and out-process, according to Stephen Rossetti, director of the Defense Integrated Travel and Relocation Solutions Office in Arlington, Va. Rossetti said under the plan, that includes proposals before Congress, service members would be offered no-receipt-required, lump-sum payment for temporary lodging expenses, temporary lodging allowances and even a monetary incentive not to ship "junk" cars overseas.

Many service members found a loophole that circumvents the requirement by some services that only those who ship a vehicle overseas can ship one back home. Some service members ship "junk" vehicles with major mechanical problems overseas so they'll be eligible to ship a car home when their tour is over.

"Military people are ordered to move. They have no choice. We need to do all we can to make it easier," Rossetti said.

If approved, the cash incentive would equate to a percentage of the cost of shipping the "junk" car overseas. The shipping cost often exceeds the value of the vehicle. The incentive proposal would guarantee that service members could ship vehicles back home, thereby eliminating unnecessary shipping costs for the government. Service members and DoD civilian employees ship more than 75,000 cars to and from overseas locations each year. The only requirement is that the vehicle be in working condition.

One of the biggest concerns is out-of-pocket expenses for PCS moves, Rossetti noted. "Surveys have shown that people in the military don't get as much in their reimbursements as they're spending," he noted. "We want to give them the wherewithal to make the most of the money they get and eliminate out-of-pocket expenses." Service members in grades E-5 to E-9 incur nonreimbursable expenses of more than \$1,000 each time they move. That amount increases for higher ranks, Rossetti said.

"Our people are captives to the process," Rossetti said. "We want to flip the current process controls on its back and have the traveler controlling the process.

"There also is a vast network of relocation experts in DoD," he said. "We need to empower them with tools to help our people."

Rossetti noted that revamping and simplifying the PCS system is an important objective of Secretary of Defense Williams S. Cohen and Deputy Secretary Rudy de Leon and is a key aspect of the effort to reform business processes in DoD. "They realize the difficulty of the moving process in the military and asked us to make it easier," Rossetti said. "We see that as a quality of life objective that's important for retention and readiness."

DoD is overhauling pieces of the process, including travel and movement of household goods, he said. "We want to ... raise the ante to solve the difficult PCS process for our people," Rossetti said.

He said the effort is orchestrated through a steering board that includes the services and other key DoD officials. Administrative costs soak up a major chunk of the more than \$3 billion DoD spends moving people each year, Rossetti said. "Every dollar we can save in administration and give to our people is a dollar they don't have to take out of their pocket to make the move," Rossetti said.

Initial savings are estimated at about \$150 million, he said. The amount is expected to swell as other initiatives are implemented.

He said 85 percent of the people who move are dissatisfied with the relocation process. They're upset because their household goods are lost or destroyed and they waste a lot of time in-processing at the library, veterinarian, commissary, personnel office and a host of other places. It's estimated that more than 40,000 man-hours are wasted each year in- and out-processing.

Simplifying the process includes cutting a 10-volume set of books and nearly 2,000 pieces of PCS entitlement data down to about 100 pages. Liking the current entitlement rules to the tax code, Rossetti said people who have the time to understand it will get the most money back, but those that can't end up spending more. The current process covers 10 functional areas including transportation, household goods, medical, and morale, welfare and recreation, and 406 sub- processes that require 117 forms and information from 36 automated systems.

The plan will incorporate the "one-stop-shopping concept," with the Internet as the integrator. "The Web is transforming America, and we want it to transform this process," Rossetti said.

The new system will be a "stress reducing," user-friendly process that reduces waiting time. "I will also have a personalized Web page outfitted with instructions and 'prepopulated' forms showing the service member's name, family members, entitlements and answers to questions," Rossetti said.

"We want to have the computer take care of service members during their move," he said. "We have something working in the lab called P-3 Quantum a personal PCS page. When you key your name, Social Security number and PIN number into the system, your personal profile comes up. The computer knows already, based on our manpower database, who you are, how many kids you have and all the other information that used to go on nearly 100 forms." The Internet enables relocation personnel to tailor the PCS process to fit each individual's moving situation, Rossetti noted. When the personal profile is validated, the traveler keys in the "from/to" destination and the computer will tell them how much money they'll get for the move. If they select the lump sum option, the money will be electronically transferred to the service member's bank account.

Preparing for household goods shipments will be made easy and take the guesswork out of figuring weight allowances. All service members will have to do is click on a piece of furniture and its approximate weight will be shown and automatically added to the inventory. The information will be stored on the personal Web page. All the service member has to do on the return trip is delete and add items.

A personalized travel calendar for in- and out-processing will have information pertaining to the losing unit, gaining unit, family information, date of departure, moving pets, firearms, and shipping vehicles. Information about updating drivers licenses, passports, drivers manuals from foreign countries, settling claims, the defense travel system, entitlements, per diem rates and other information needed for a PCS move.

Rossetti said changing the PCS move process is not only a quality of life issue, but a retention and readiness objective. "If you allow people to get on the ground quicker, we're more productive in terms of use of their time. And, if a PCS isn't so painful, maybe people will be more likely to re-enlist," he said.

Rossetti emphasized that the proposal doesn't increase temporary lodging and temporary housing allowances. "It allows an up-front payment that can be used for any expenses," he said. "For example, it wouldn't require receipts. So if you have an alternative to staying in temporary lodging, you can stay with a relative or friend and use the money for something else associated with a PCS move. What we care about is you get to your duty station on time and with the least pain."

DoD is also asking Congress to sanction cost avoidance incentives for household goods. "Right now, if you're authorized a 10,000-pound weight allowance, you're going to keep shipping that 10,000 pounds around the world for your whole military career," Rossetti said. "But if you get an incentive not to ship your whole weight allowance, then you won't be tempted to move these barbells or books you've carried around for years." Several projects are under way concerning household goods moves, including the Full Service Movement Project and the [relocation section](#) of the Air Forces Crossroads Web site.

"We'll have a demonstration of the capability in April and the Web site will be up for use this summer," Rossetti noted. "It will be a virtual moving experience. If we can't be like Star Trek and beam you to your new location, we hope to come close."